Nietzsche and the Morality Critics
Author(s): Brian Leiter
Reviewed work(s):
Source: *Ethics*, Vol. 107, No. 2 (Jan., 1997), pp. 250-285
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381948

Nietzsche and the Morality Critics*

Brian Leiter

I. INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche has long been one of the dominant figures in twentieth-century intellectual life. Yet it is only recently that he has come into his own in Anglo-American philosophy, thanks to a renewed interest in his critical work in ethics.[1] This new appreciation of Nietzsche is

* For helpful comments on earlier versions of some or all of this material, I am grateful to Elizabeth Anderson, Frithjof Bergmann, Maudemarie Clark, Stephen Darwall, Ken Gemes, David Hills, Thomas Pogge, and, especially, Peter Railton. I have also benefited from the comments and questions of philosophical audiences at Rutgers University (New Brunswick), and the Universities of Arizona (Tucson), California (San Diego), and Texas (Austin). Finally, I thank the editors and anonymous referees for *Ethics* for their useful comments on the penultimate draft.

1. A very different Nietzsche has engaged thinkers elsewhere, notably on the European continent and in literature departments in the United States. There the key themes have been perspectivism, the primacy of interpretation (and, at the same time, its indeterminacy), and the impossibility of truth. This Nietzsche is well represented by Paul de Man, in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), esp. chaps. 5 and 6, and by many of the essays in D. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche* (New York: Delta, 1977); it has received its most sophisticated articulation, however, in Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), a book which, accordingly, gives only cursory attention to Nietzsche's moral philosophy. The problems with this reading of Nietzsche—which are, I think, many—are discussed in my "Nietzsche and Aestheticism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992): 275–90, and my "Perspectivism in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. R. Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Compare Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chaps. 1–4. Interestingly, the last explosion of Anglo-American philosophical interest in Nietzsche—roughly, from 1900 until the end of World War I—was also driven by an interest in his ethics (and esp. its connection to evolutionary theory and positivism). See, e[illegible] Maurice Adams, "The Ethics of Tolstoy and Nietzsche," *Ethics* 11 (1900): 82–1[illegible] Alfred W. Benn, "The Morals of an Immoralist—Friedrich Nietzsche," *Ethics* 19 (1908–9): 1–23, 192–211; A. K. Rogers, "Nietzsche and Democracy," *Philosophical Review* 21 (1912): 32–[illegible] William M. Salter, "Nietzsche's Moral Aim," *Ethics* 25 (1915): 226–51, 372–403; Bertram Laing, "The Metaphysics of Nietzsche's Immoralism," *Philosophical Review* 24 (1915): 386–418. One may hope that no philosopher today would write, as one dissenter from the Nietzsche revival did then, that "nothing . . . quite so worthless as 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' or 'Beyond Good and Evil' has ever attracted so much attention from serious students of the philosophy

Ethics 107 (January 1997): 250–285
 0014-1704/97/0702-0003$01.00

reflected in the work of many philosophers. For Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, Nietzsche is the first to diagnose the failure of the project of post-Enlightenment moral theory—even though, according to MacIntyre, Nietzsche wrongly thinks that such theory is the last hope for moral objectivity.[2] For Annette Baier, he is one of those "great moral philosophers" who show us an alternative to the dominant traditions in modern moral theory, an alternative in which we "reflect on the actual phenomenon of morality, see what it is, how it is transmitted, what difference it makes."[3] For Susan Wolf, he represents an "approach to moral philosophy" in which the sphere of the "moral" comes to encompass those personal excellencies that Utilitarian and Kantian moral theories seem to preclude.[4] For other recent writers, he figures as the exemplar of a philosophical approach to morality that these writers either endorse (e.g., Philippa Foot) or reject (e.g., Thomas Nagel, Michael Slote).[5] Indeed, in looking at the claim common to critics of morality like Slote, Foot, Wolf, and Bernard Williams—that "moral considerations are not always the most important considerations"—Robert Louden has recently asked, "Have Nietzsche's 'new philosophers' finally arrived on the scene: 'spirits strong and original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert "eternal values"'?" (BGE, 203)[6]

In this paper, I propose to investigate and delineate more precisely the real similarities and differences between Nietzsche "the immoral-

---

of moral ➔ Herbert Stewart, "Some Criticisms on the Nietzsche Revival," *Ethics* 19 [1909]: 427–28).

2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), esp. pp. 107–11.

3. Annette Baier, "Theory and Reflective Practices," in *Postures of the Mind* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 207–27, p. 224.

4. Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 419–39, p. 433.

5. See, e.g., Michael Slote, *Goods and Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), p. 79; Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 196; Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values," in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. R. Solomon (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), esp. p. 163; see also her "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives?" reprinted in her *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

6. Robert Louden, "Can We Be Too Moral?" *Ethics* 98 (1988): 361–80, p. 361. Louden begins his essay by quoting Nietzsche's call for "a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called in question*" (GM, pref.). A note on citations: I cite Nietzsche's texts using the standard English-language acronyms: *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), *Untimely Meditations* (U), *Dawn* (D), *The Gay Science* (GS), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM), *Twilight of the Idols* (TI), *The Antichrist* (A), *Ecce Homo* (EH), *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (NCW), and *The Will to Power* (WP). Roman numerals refer to major divisions or chapters; arabic numerals refer to sections, not pages. Translations, with occasional minor emendations, are by Walter Kaufmann and/or R. J. Hollingdale; for purposes of making emendations, I rely upon the *Sämtliche Werke in 15 Bänden,* ed. G. Colli and M. Mottinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980).

ist" and the recent critical writers in moral philosophy. Doing so will require first saying something about the distinct strands in the recent critical literature, since not all of these have made equal—or equally interesting—claims on Nietzsche. After surveying briefly the landscape of recent critical work, I will examine in detail just one aspect of this work—that associated with those philosophers I will call the "Morality Critics." I hope to show that, notwithstanding some superficial similarities, Nietzsche is in fact engaged in a critique of morality in terms quite foreign to recent discussion in the Anglo-American world. For what distinguishes Nietzsche, I will argue, is that he is a genuine critic of *morality* as a real cultural phenomenon, while recent Anglo-American writers are only critics of particular *philosophical theories of morality*. Nietzsche, unlike these writers, situates his critique of morality within a broader "cultural critique," in which morality is attacked as only the most important of a variety of social and cultural forces posing obstacles to human flourishing. This approach to critique places Nietzsche, *not* in the company of Anglo-American morality critics, but rather in that European tradition of modernist discontent with bourgeois Christian culture that runs, we might say, from Baudelaire to Freud, with faint echoes audible in the critical theories of Adorno and Marcuse.[7] Like these critics, Nietzsche is concerned with the condition of a culture, not the shortcomings of a theory, and in particular with the character and consequences of its moral culture. Because of this fundamental difference between Nietzsche and recent Anglo-American philosophy, Nietzsche's critique also represents a far more *speculative* challenge to morality. In the concluding section of this paper, I will pose some critical questions about the plausibility of Nietzsche's attack.

II. THEORY CRITICS AND MORALITY CRITICS

We must begin, however, with some distinctions: first, between morality and moral theory; and, second, between types of criticism of moral theory. When I say that recent Anglo-American work has been critical only of particular *theories* of morality, but not of morality itself, the distinction I have in mind is simple enough: it is the difference between, on the one hand, morality as an everyday cultural phenomenon, the stuff of common sense and common opinion, guiding the conduct of ordinary people; and, on the other hand, morality as more or less systematized, improved, and codified in some theoretical framework produced by a philosopher. Of course, most moral theorists presumably think that their theory captures what is essential to morality as an everyday cultural phenomenon. They may or may not be right in

7. See the useful overview in Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 4–7, 30.

this claim. But even if the theory does capture what is *conceptually* central to morality as an everyday cultural phenomenon, a critic may still worry about the effects of the unsystematic, uncodified, unimproved moral beliefs that comprise the daily life of the culture. Such a critique might invite the philosophical rejoinder that the deficiencies of "ordinary" morality simply need to be cured by good philosophy. I shall, in fact, return to this type of objection after we have set out Nietzsche's own critique in greater detail.

Recent Anglo-American criticism, in contrast to Nietzsche, has taken as its target moral theory, but it has done so in two quite distinct senses. Let us call the "Theory Critics"—philosophers like Annette Baier, Charles Larmore, Charles Taylor, and sometimes Bernard Williams—those who think that our "particular moral assessments and commonsense moral principles" are not the sort of things about which one should or can have a *theory* (in some precise and technical sense of the word 'theory').[8] The qualification here is important, for the position of the Theory Critics is not a rank anti-intellectualism or some sort of ethical particularism.[9] What, then, are the marks of "theory" in this objectionable sense (hereafter Theory)? A survey of the recent literature suggests that a Theory is *often* characterized by two aims in particular:

> i) Reduction: Theory tries to reduce all value to a single, unitary source;[10]

and

> ii) Mechanical Decision: Theory tries to articulate an explicit, mechanical decision procedure for generating answers to ethical questions (or explicit criteria for ethical decision and a decision procedure for their application).[11]

8. See Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward *Fin de siecle* Ethics: Some Trends," *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 115–89, p. 181. This forms the subject matter of *normative* theory, which these authors, following Baier, identify as the primary target of those I am calling the Theory Critics.

9. See Jonathan Dancy, "Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties," *Mind* 92 (1983): 530–47.

10. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 16–17, cited hereafter in the text as ELP; Thomas Nagel, "The Fragmentation of Value," reprinted in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 131–32; Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 138; Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," reprinted in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Elsewhere in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy,* Williams worries about a different kind of reductionism, i.e., the attempt to reduce all practical reasoning and all obligation to *moral* reasoning and *moral* obligation. See esp. chap. 10.

11. Bernard Williams, "Preface," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. x; Larmore, p. ix, chap. 1; Taylor. Something similar seems to be Annette Baier's target in "Theory and Reflective Practices," and "Doing without Moral

These pernicious aspects of Theory are closely related, for it is precisely Theory's reduction of value to a single source that makes possible Theory's goal of a Mechanical Decision procedure, namely, one that uses the privileged basic value to "churn out" (we might say) moral directives.[12] Against these aims, the Theory Critics argue that value is not unitary (there is, in Taylor's phrase, a "diversity" of goods) and that (partly as a result) Mechanical Decision procedures are simply impossible in the ethical life: ethical decision and action, these critics say, requires practical wisdom, virtues, or sensitivity to the particular context, all things which (allegedly) cannot be captured within the confines of Theory.

Anyone familiar with the recent literature knows that it appears to contain more complaints—and certainly more epithets—than just these: Moral Theory is said to be too abstract, too general, too systematic, too foundationalist, too simplistic, and too contemptuous of non-Theoretical forms of reflection.[13] I would suggest, though, that all these complaints are most helpfully thought of as variations on the critique of Reduction and Mechanical Decision. For example, it is *because* Theory reduces value to a single source that it is too simplistic. Similarly, it is *because* Theory wants a Mechanical Decision procedure that can generate answers in any particular case that Theory ends up being too general and too abstract.

Focusing the critique of Theory in this way is useful because of a certain tension in the writings of the Theory Critics, for a common refrain among them is that the rejection of Theory (in the technical sense) does not entail the rejection of ethical reflection.[14] But if reflec-

---

Theory?" (reprinted in *Postures of the Mind,* pp. 228–45), esp. in her talk of the theorist's hierarchical ordering of more principles "in which the less general are derived from the more general" ("Doing without Moral Theory?" p. 232) on the model of a legal system ("Theory and Reflective Practices," p. 214) (where the latter is thought of, in a pre–Legal Realist sense, as involving the deduction of particular decisions from general rules).

12. Taylor aptly calls this the ambition for a "single-consideration procedure," a label which suggests the unity of Reduction and Mechanical Decision, and objects that such a procedure cannot do justice to "the real diversity of goods that we recognize" (pp. 245, 247).

13. See Baier, "Theory and Reflective Practices" and "Doing without Moral Theory?"; and Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy,* esp. pp. 115–17, 127, 202.

14. For example, Baier argues for ethical reflection without "normative theory in the Kantian sense" while noting that "reflectiveness about our practices requires at the very least noting whether they are counterproductive to their expressed aims" ("Theory and Reflective Practices," p. 226). Williams wonders throughout *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* "why reflection should be taken to require theory" (p. 112) and claims that "philosophy in the modern world cannot make any special claim to reflectiveness" (p. 3). Taylor goes further and concedes that even if there are a plurality of goods, "people . . . are faced with the job of somehow making them

tion is not simply to lead us back into Theory, then we must have some *clear* idea of what Theory is—something more than that it is an account of morality that is too simple or too abstract. Indeed, it would seem that if something is to count as reflecting at all—as opposed, say, simply to emoting—then it *must* aim for some degree of abstraction, simplification, generality, and coherence. To reflect at all must involve abstracting from the particular case and identifying (some of) the general features which permit comparison and harmonizing with other cases. Theory in the objectionable sense must require something else, otherwise all reflection would involve Theory. I have suggested that this something else is captured by the joint aims of Reduction and Mechanical Decision: it is these that mark the line between bad Theory and good ethical reflection.

Yet these considerations suggest something further. For some degree of abstraction, generality, and coherence—the minimal requirements of all reflection—are also surely among the minimal desiderata of all *theory* construction. In that case, we ought to say that theory in this minimalist sense really is part of ethical reflection. Thus, by ordinary usage, it would be misleading to describe the complaint of the Theory Critics as directed at theory per se, since they only target those theoretical ambitions (i.e., Reduction and Mechanical Decision) that go beyond the minimal requirements. The difference between the Theory Critics and the mainstream of the modern tradition is, ultimately, one of degree, not kind.[15]

Those I will call the "Morality Critics," by contrast, are those—like Michael Slote, Michael Stocker, Susan Wolf, and, again, Bernard Williams—who criticize moral theory, not because of its theoretical ambitions, but because of its *moral* commitments (more precisely, either the substantive *content* of the morality endorsed or the *weight* assigned in practical reasoning to moral demands). Admittedly, the Morality Critics often present themselves as critics of morality itself—in that sense they echo Nietzsche—but, on examination, it is clear that their targets are specific theories of morality, consequentialist and deontological. The Williams of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* is illustrative in this regard, for he might seem, at first sight, a counterexample to

compatible in their lives" (p. 236) and that, as a result, "the demand for a unified theory" is a "demand we cannot totally repudiate" (p. 245).

15. This is clearest in the case of writers like Nagel and Larmore, who explicitly affirm both the tenability of moral theory and the indispensable role of something like Aristotle's practical wisdom or judgment in our moral life. See Nagel, "The Fragmentation of Value," pp. 135–37; and Larmore, chap. 1, p. 151 ("My intention . . . has not been to deny the possibilities or importance of moral theory. I do not believe that the complexity of morality is so great, so boundless, that it baffles any attempt at systematization.").

this characterization.[16] After all, Williams calls "morality" "the peculiar institution" and says this morality "is not an invention of philosophers . . . [but rather] the outlook, or, incoherently, part of the outlook, of almost all of us" (ELP, p. 174). He goes on to worry about the "several natural ways in which" this morality's special notion of obligation "can come to dominate a life altogether" (ELP, pp. 181–82). In passages like these, Williams seems to be objecting *not* that the best moral *theory* requires obligation to dominate life, but rather that once moral obligation is allowed to "structure ethical thought" (ELP, p. 182), it has a "natural" tendency to rule out all other considerations.

Yet appearances here are deceiving. While Williams plainly wants to align himself with Nietzsche as a critic of morality as a genuine cultural phenomenon—hence the rhetoric about "the peculiar institution" and morality not being "an invention of philosophers"—it is far from clear that the notion of moral obligation he discusses is anything other than a philosopher's "invention" or, at best, such a severe systematic reworking of the ordinary notion as to be only a distant relative of the unsystematic, uncodified notion of obligation actually at work in our culture.

Morality's purportedly threatening notion of "obligation," for example, is constructed by Williams entirely from the works of Kant and Ross, with no gesture at showing what relation their philosophically refined notions of "obligation" bear to those in play in ordinary life. Yet where is the evidence, one might ask, that real people treat "moral obligation[s] [as] inescapable" (ELP, p. 177) and that they accept the idea that "only an obligation can beat an obligation" (ELP, p. 180)? Surely the evidence is not in the way people actually live, in the way they actually honor—or, more often, breach—their moral obligations, a point Nietzsche well understood.[17] What is the evidence that, in our relativistic culture, individuals think that "moral obligation applies to people even if they do not want it to" (ELP, p. 178)? Even Williams, in leading up to the specter of morality dominating life, says that "the thought can gain a footing (*I am not saying that it has to*) that I could be better employed than in doing something I am under no [moral] obligation to do, and, if I could be, then I ought to be" (ELP, p. 181, emphasis added). But surely this "thought" might only gain a footing for Kant or Ross, or some other philosopher who followed out to its logical conclusion a deontological *theory*. It is a pure philosopher's fantasy to think that real people in the moral culture at large find themselves overwhelmed by this burdensome sense of moral obliga-

16. I take the preceding sentence to be a more obviously apt characterization of some of Williams's earlier work in ethics.

17. See the further discussion in Sec. V.

tion. Like the other Morality Critics, Williams writes as though he is attacking "morality," when what he is really attacking is "morality" as conceived, systematized, and refined by philosophers. Such a critique may be a worthy endeavor, but it is far different from worrying about the "dangers" of ordinary morality as understood—unsystematically and inchoately—by ordinary people.

What, then, distinguishes a Morality Critic from a Theory Critic if both are ultimately talking about moral *theory?* Roughly, the idea is this: for the former, there is always room, *in principle,* for a better theory to thwart the criticsm, while for the latter, Theory (in the technical sense) is the heart of the problem, not part of the solution. These points are well illustrated in Stocker's well-known paper "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories."[18] Stocker argues that "if we . . . embody in our motives, those various things which recent ethical theories hold to be ultimately good or right, we will, of necessity, be unable to have those motives" (p. 461) and thus be unable to realize the associated goods (e.g., friendship, love, pleasure). Stocker claims, however, that a suitable ethical theory must be one in which reasons and motives can be brought into harmony, such that one can be moved to act by what the theory identifies as "good" or "right." Stocker's point isn't, then, that theorizing in ethics is a misguided enterprise; it's just that we need better theories, ones in which theoretical reasons can also serve as motives for action. Like a Morality Critic, Stocker holds that adherence to morality as it is (read: moral theory as it is) is incompatible with having the motives requisite for certain personal goods ("love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community," p. 461); unlike a Theory Critic, he allows, or at least implies, that a better (i.e., nonschizophrenic) theory could solve the problem.[19]

We need, however, a more precise characterization of the Morality Critics, since the preceding account would also capture types of criticism that appear to have no affinity whatsoever with Nietzsche's. What I have in mind, of course, is the tradition of deontological criticism of consequentialism and of consequentialist criticism of deontological theories.[20] Such criticisms are not about theory per se but about the moral commitments of the theories. Yet worries about the rationality

18. Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 453–66, cited in this section by page number.

19. See esp. the concluding pages of Stocker's piece. Susan Wolf presents a slightly different case than other Morality Critics in this regard; see "Moral Saints," pp. 435–37; and my discussion in n. 26.

20. For example, of the former type, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), esp. pp. 26–27; of the latter type, Samuel Scheffler, "Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues," *Mind* 94 (1985): 409–19, esp. p. 409.

of constraints on good maximization, or about consequentialist violations of the autonomy and dignity of individuals, would not seem to be the sorts of worries that call to mind the writings of Nietzsche. We need, then, a sharper characterization of the "Morality Critics," one which excludes intramoral debates between Kantians and consequentialists.

Yet this very way of stating the problem also suggests its solution. What characterizes the Morality Critics is precisely that they criticize morality *extra*morally, from the standpoint of nonmoral goods and considerations. Such a tentative characterization, of course, generates its own problems—first, because we need a clearer grasp of the distinction between the moral and the extramoral; and second, because of the potentially question-begging designation of certain sorts of goods and considerations as extramoral (defenders of morality, as we shall see, often argue that these goods and reasons are included within the moral point of view, suitably construed).[21] Yet if we agree to treat the "moral" as exhausted by deontology and consequentialism, then we can say that the Morality Critics are those philosophers who criticize the moral commitments of theory from the standpoint of (*apparently*) nonmoral goods and considerations.

But let us now try to state this view even more precisely. A Morality Critic takes as her target—to borrow Susan Wolf's phrase—"a perfect master of a moral theory" (p. 435), deontological or consequentialist. The Morality Critic then argues that such a perfect master is precluded from realizing certain nonmoral goods and excellences—let us call them "personal goods."[22] This follows from the truth of two theses:

21. A third difficulty is that some writers construe demands of, e.g., partiality and integrity to be essentially moral demands, apart from their role in deontological and consequentialist theories. See David Brink, "Utilitarian Morality and the Personal Point of View," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 417–38, pp. 418–19; Larmore, pp. 132–33. This construal is not, I think, suggested by the writings of most Morality Critics themselves and, in any event, can be dealt with in the way suggested in the text.

22. Nagel speaks of morality posing "a serious threat to the kind of personal life that many of us take to be desirable" (*View from Nowhere,* p. 190). Wolf claims that the "moral saint" cannot realize "a great variety of forms of personal excellence" (p. 426). Bernard Williams argues that both Kantian and utilitarian theories will sometimes require us to abandon our "ground projects," those projects "which propel [a person] in the future, and give him (in a sense) a reason for living" ("Persons, Character, and Morality," in *The Identities of Persons,* ed. A. Rorty [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], pp. 209–10). See Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 77–150, esp. pp. 115–17, and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy,* esp. pp. 181–82 (worrying that a Kantian notion of obligation can "come to dominate life altogether"). Slote argues that a commitment to morality would require us to "deplore and disavow" (p. 85) certain otherwise admirable traits like "single-minded devotion to aesthetic goals or ideals" (p. 80)—because of their essential tendency also

> Incompatibility Thesis (IT): Acting in accordance with morality is (at least sometimes) incompatible with realizing or enjoying these personal goods;[23]

and

> Overridingness Thesis (OT): Moral considerations are always the practically determinative considerations, and thus override all competing considerations.

It is the conjunction of IT and OT that generates the problem: for (by IT) moral considerations will conflict with "personal" considerations, and (by OT) personal considerations must lose. Since it would be intolerable actually to abandon these personal considerations, however, Morality Critics take this conflict to show that we must reject OT: moral considerations are not always the practically determinative considerations.[24] Defenders of morality, by contrast, typically reject IT:

---

to produce immoral behavior. Michael Stocker is probably an exception to the characterization offered in the text. While most Morality Critics view the nonmoral goods and considerations as largely *prudential* in character, Stocker is concerned with phenomena like "love" and "friendship" whose value is probably not prudential. See "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories."

23. For example, Wolf: "The admiration of and striving toward achieving any of a great variety of forms of personal excellence are character traits it is valuable and desirable for people to have. . . . In thinking that it is good for a person to strive for [this] ideal . . . , we implicitly acknowledge the goodness of ideals incompatible with that of the moral saint" (p. 426). The truth of IT is defended in slightly different ways by the Critics, depending on whether they are taking consequentialism or Kantianism as the target. (For consequentialism, and specifically Utilitarianism, see Wolf, pp. 427–30; Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," pp. 93–118, "Persons, Character, and Morality," pp. 199–200, 210; for Kantianism, see Wolf, pp. 430–33; Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chap. 10.) However, as a number of writers have noted, there is a common element in both deontological and consequentialist theories that is supposed to generate IT, i.e., their commitment to an *impersonal* point of view and *impartial* value. Because of this commitment, these theories cannot (according to the Critics) do real justice to the importance of our various *personal* and *partial* attachments and projects: such projects and attachments can always be sacrificed when impersonal and impartial considerations demand it. Our most important personal project is, after all, just one among many from the moral point of view, which is precisely why (according to the Critics) morality cannot do justice to its significance and value. See Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, pp. 189–91.

24. Wolf challenges "the assumption that it is always better to be morally better" and concludes that "our values cannot be fully comprehended on the model of a hierarchical system with morality at the top" (p. 438). Slote claims that the possibility of admirable immorality should "[loosen] . . . our attachment to the 'overridingness' thesis" (p. 107). Williams concludes, "Life has to have substance if anything is to have sense, including adherence to the impartial [moral] system; but if it has substance, then it cannot grant supreme importance to the impartial system" ("Persons, Character, and Morality," p. 215). Owen Flanagan identifies "this assumption of the sovereignty of the moral good" as the target of critics like Wolf, Williams, and Slote (Owen Flanagan, "Admirable Immorality and Admirable Imperfection," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 [1986]:

they argue that personal goods and moral goods are not incompatible because, for example, morality includes personal goods within its (suitably objective) purview or because morality includes supererogatory duties or virtues, such that morality can recognize morally praiseworthy conduct without always demanding its performance in a way that would inevitably override personal considerations.[25]

We will find it convenient, I think, to borrow Nagel's language (*View from Nowhere,* pp. 193 ff.) and speak of the general issue here in terms of a conflict between the "Good Life" (one in which personal considerations are dominant) and the "Moral Life" (one in which moral considerations govern)—or between "living well" and "doing right." According to IT, the Good Life and the Moral Life are incompatible; according to OT, the Moral Life must prevail, at the expense of the Good Life (given IT). Note, too, where Nagel locates Nietzsche in the debate thus framed:

> *The good life overrides the moral life.* This is Nietzsche's position. . . . The view is that if, taking everything into consideration, a moral

---

41–60, p. 41). Note that for at least Williams, morality already does its damage—in the form of "alienation"—once it asks us to view our personal projects as up for grabs in moral deliberation (whether or not morality ultimately requires us to abandon them).

25. On the "objective purview" response: see, e.g., Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality," reprinted in *Consequentialism and Its Critics,* ed. S. Scheffler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 93–133, esp. pp. 113–17; see also Sarah Conly, "Utilitarianism and Integrity," *Monist* 66 (1983): 298–311, esp. p. 303. This general point is often put by saying that Utilitarianism provides a criterion or standard of rightness, not a decision procedure. See Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics,* 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), bk. 4, chap. 1, sec. 1, and chap. 3, sec. 3; R. E. Bales, "Act-Utilitarianism: Account of Right-Making Characteristics or Decision-Making Procedure?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 257–65; Brink. On the "supererogation" response: see, e.g., Nagel, *View from Nowhere,* pp. 203–4; Stephen Darwall, "Abolishing Morality," *Synthese* 72 (1987): 71–89, esp. pp. 78–83. Note that for the "Kantians," the ability of morality to accommodate personal goods also derives from morality's objective or impersonal point of view. As Nagel explains it, "The appearance of supererogation in a morality is a recognition from an impersonal standpoint of the difficulties with which that standpoint has to contend in becoming motivationally effective in the real life of beings of whom it is only one aspect" (p. 204). In contrast, Barbara Herman argues that Kantianism indeed does not permit "*unconditional attachment*" to personal projects irrespective of their morality and that "it does not seem rational to want it otherwise." She claims further that such *unconditional* attachments are not even essential to one's character or integrity (Barbara Herman, "Integrity and Impartiality," *Monist* 66 [1983]: 233–50, p. 243). See also Conly's related response to Williams on behalf of Utilitarianism at pp. 305–11, p. 308 ("as much emotional attachment [to personal projects] as Williams wants, admittedly more than utilitarianism allows, gives not so much integrity as something like solipsism"); and Marcia Baron's response to Slote in "On Admirable Immorality," *Ethics* 96 (1986): 557–66, esp. pp. 563–64 (single-minded devotion [to a project] that knows *no* bounds is *not* admirable and is rightly prohibited by morality). I return to these issues in n. 51, below.

life will not be a good life for the individual it would be a mistake to lead it. (*View from Nowhere,* p. 196)

This passage aptly describes the core of the supposed relation between Nietzsche and the Morality Critics: like them, Nietzsche is supposed to side with the importance of the Good Life against the encroaching demands of the Moral Life. Even granting that Nietzsche is perhaps more extreme in his rejection of the demands of the Moral Life, he still counts as the first in a line of Morality Critics that includes Williams, Wolf, Slote, and others who (*a*) recognize the truth of IT and (*b*) part company with the tradition in their rejection of morality's OT. We shall have occasion to consider shortly how well this picture really captures Nietzsche's critical project.[26] It remains to say, first, a few brief words about Nietzsche and the Theory Critics.

Nietzsche's notorious hostility to systematic theorizing—evidenced in his quip that "the will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI, I, sec. 26)—would seem to make him a natural ally of the Theory Critics. It is true, moreover, that Nietzsche does not offer a normative ethical theory in the way that Kant or Sidgwick or any other representative of the tradition does.[27] Yet Nietzsche's reason for this has nothing

26. Some cautionary notes about the distinction developed in this section between Theory and Morality Critics are in order. There is, of course, a real distinction here, but it may not be as easy to mark as I have so far suggested. Take, e.g., Susan Wolf's remark that "the basic problem with any of the models of moral sainthood . . . is that they are dominated by a single, all-important value under which all other possible values must be subsumed" (p. 431). As a freestanding complaint, this could be made by a Theory Critic as well as a Morality Critic: for the former, it would come in the context of an attack on the reductionist aims of Theory based on the real "diversity of goods"; for the latter, it would serve to show that the reason the ("perfect master's") Moral Life is incompatible with the Good Life is that it privileges some type of *moral* value at the expense of other, nonmoral values. Quite generally, it is easy to see how, e.g., objections to the reductionist aims of Theory based on the plurality of values can quickly start to sound like objections to Morality for wrongly overriding other distinct sources of value. The difference here may only be a matter of emphasis, though it is a difference that is real enough: the Theory Critic invokes the plurality of values to emphasize the inadequacy of a theoretical framework which excludes so much, while the Morality Critic invokes the plurality of values in order to emphasize the costs of morality's OT and to argue against it. The ease with which we might move from one sort of criticism to the other should not obscure the fact, however, that many writers lodge themselves firmly in one camp rather than the other—in fact, only Williams and Foot seem to take both sorts of critical positions. Wolf, e.g., is explicit in distancing herself from any critique of theory per se: "The flaws of a perfect master of a moral theory need not reflect flaws in the intramoral content of the theory itself" (p. 435). Rather, for Wolf, such flaws show only the need for *more* theory, a theory of "reasons that are independent of moral reasons for wanting ourselves and others to develop our characters and live our lives in certain ways" (p. 437).

27. A different question is whether he offers an ethical theory more akin to ancient ones—say, a type of virtue ethics, as some recent writers have suggested. See, e.g., John Casey, *Pagan Virtue: An Essay in Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), esp. pp. 79–83;

to do with the sort of reasons that animate recent Theory Criticism. Nietzsche's hostility to normative theorizing grows, instead, out of his naturalism and fatalism,[28] which lead him to be deeply skeptical about the utility of propounding normative theories about what we ought to do. Thus, for example, he declares that "the single human being is a piece of *fatum* from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be" (TI, V, sec. 6). Given that this is Nietzsche's view, it is unsurprising that he should also say: "A man as he *ought* to be: that sounds to us as insipid as 'a tree as it ought to be'" (WP, 332). Of course, Nietzsche does think that values can play a *causal* role in a person's actions (cf. GS, 335), or he would not be concerned to undertake a revaluation of values. He thinks, simply, that the causal efficacy of values is always circumscribed by the natural facts that make a person who he or she is.[29] It is the failure of traditional ethical theories to grasp this point that leads him to think they are useless. The philosophical motivation, then, for Nietzsche's opposition to normative theory simply bears no relation to that found in the Theory Critics.

I want to turn, then, to what seems a more immediate, and deep, affinity between Nietzsche and those philosophers I called the Morality Critics.

Lester Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 1991). The difficulties with Hunt's account will serve to highlight the problems confronting this interpretation of Nietzsche. According to Hunt, Nietzsche's theory of virtue is "procedural": "it specifies which traits are virtues by indicating a certain process and declaring that any trait that arises from this process is virtuous" (p. 145). The relevant process is given by Nietzsche's "experimentalism," which requires us to experiment with different goals until we find those which bring about "a complete integration of the psyche" (p. 141), such that "one part of the self imposes order on other, potentially chaotic parts by successfully orienting the subordinate parts towards its own purposes" (p. 128). The traits that are conducive to the integrating goals are, says Hunt, virtues for Nietzsche. There is certainly something broadly right about this picture, though its vagueness is only one of its several problems. First, the theory seems not so much procedural as substantive, since it employs a substantive criterion (integration of the self) for identifying which goal-oriented activities involve virtues. Second, it seems to stretch Nietzsche's ambitions considerably to attribute to him something called a "procedural theory of virtue." Third, Hunt gives almost none of the detail about particular virtues that interest most contemporary writers (including, e.g., Casey), even relegating Nietzsche's own specific virtue lists to an endnote (p. 187, n. 4). While Hunt has a multitude of interesting things to say about Nietzsche, it is not clear that his account makes Nietzsche a virtue theorist of much practical or philosophical help.

28. For a more substantial discussion of these oft-neglected themes in Nietzsche's work, see Brian Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. C. Janaway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in press).

29. For further discussion, see ibid.

III. NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF MORALITY

Why does Nietzsche attack morality? I want to begin by setting out in summary form an account that I have developed in greater detail elsewhere.[30] Since Nietzsche uses the word "morality" (*Moral*) in both positive and negative senses,[31] I will introduce a "technical" term to mark "morality" as the object of his critique: what I will call henceforth "morality in the pejorative sense" (MPS).

All moralities are, for Nietzsche, characterized by a *descriptive* and a *normative* component; that is, they (*a*) presuppose a particular descriptive account of human agency in the sense that, for the normative claims to have intelligible application to human agents, particular metaphysical and empirical claims about agency must be true and (*b*) embody a normative agenda which creates or sustains the special conditions under which only certain types of human agents enjoy success. Any particular morality will, in turn, be an *MPS* for Nietzsche if it

> i) presupposes certain *particular* descriptive claims about the nature of human agents: for example, that agents act freely and thus are responsible for what they do ("the Descriptive Component");

and/or

> ii) embodies a normative agenda which benefits the "lowest" human beings while harming the "highest" ("the Normative Component").

Note, first, that these two components are not of equal importance for Nietzsche, for what ultimately defines an MPS as against morality in a nonpejorative sense is the distinctive normative agenda. Thus, while Nietzsche criticizes at length the view of agency that he takes to be implicit in at least certain paradigmatic examples of MPS, he also holds that "it is *not* error as error that" he objects to fundamentally in an MPS (EH, IV, sec. 7). That is, it is *not* the falsity of the descriptive account of agency presupposed by MPS, per se, that is the heart of the problem. Thus, strictly speaking, it is true that a morality could be an MPS even if it did not involve a commitment to an untenable

30. See esp. Brian Leiter, "Morality in the Pejorative Sense: On the Logic of Nietzsche's Critique of Morality," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 3 (1995): 113–45, and a Leiter, "Beyond Good and Evil," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1993): 261–70. The former sets out the affinities and differences my account has with those common in the secondary literature.

31. For some nonpejorative uses of the word 'morality', see, e.g., TI, IV, sec. 4 (where he speaks of the possibility of a "healthy morality" [*gesunde Moral*]), and BGE, 202 ("higher moralities" [*Morale*]). On the nature and content of such a morality, see my "Beyond Good and Evil."

descriptive account of agency.[32] Because Nietzsche's most common specific target is, however, Christian morality, the critique of the Descriptive Component of MPS figures prominently in Nietzsche's writing. For purposes here, however, I will concentrate on the Normative Component, which constitutes the philosophical heart of Nietzsche's critique.

According to Nietzsche, the normative agenda of an MPS favors the interests of the lowest human beings at the expense of the highest. Before illustrating what such an agenda might look like, we need, first, to establish that this is, in fact, central to Nietzsche's conception of MPS and, second, to explore what Nietzsche means by higher and lower persons.

In the secondary literature, Nietzsche has been saddled with a variety of different accounts and critiques of MPS.[33] A popular thought, for example, is that Nietzsche objects to morality because of its claim of universal applicability.[34] Yet Nietzsche never objects to the universality of moral demands, per se, as an intrinsically bad feature of MPS; rather, he finds universality objectionable because he holds that "the demand of one morality for all is detrimental to the higher men" (BGE, 228). Similarly, he holds that "when a decadent type of man ascended to the rank of the highest type [via MPS], this could only happen at *the expense of its countertype,* the type of man that is strong and sure of life" (EH, III, sec. 5, emphasis added). Finally, consider the illuminating preface to the *Genealogy,* in which Nietzsche sums up his basic concern particularly well:

> What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the "good," likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living *at the expense of the future?* Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but at the same time in a meaner style, more basely?—So that precisely morality [MPS] would be to blame if the *highest power and splendor* [*höchste Mächtigkeit und Pracht*] possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers? (GM, preface, sec. 6; cf. BT, "Attempt," sec. 5)

32. Smart's Utilitarianism is a good example of an MPS that embodies a normative agenda that is objectionable on Nietzschean grounds, while involving no commitment to an untenable metaphysics of agency. See esp. J. J. C. Smart, "'Ought,' 'Can,' Free Will and Responsibility," in *Ethics, Persuasion and Truth* (London: Routledge, 1984). Bernard Williams has gone so far as to suggest that because blaming can be justified on utilitarian grounds alone (and regardless of whether agents have free will), Utilitarianism is, at best, a "marginal member of the morality system"—where Williams takes Kantian morality to be the paradigmatic member (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy,* p. 178).

33. See the overview in Leiter, "Morality in the Pejorative Sense," pp. 113–17.

34. See, e.g., Nehamas, pp. 209, 214, 223.

In these and many other passages,[35] Nietzsche makes plain his real objection to MPS: simply put, MPS thwarts the development of human excellence, that is, "the highest power and splendor . . . possible to the type man." This is the very heart of Nietzsche's challenge to morality.

But who are Nietzsche's "higher types," these individuals who possess "the highest power and splendor"? Nietzsche alternately calls them "strong," "healthy," and "noble"; conversely, the lowest men are "weak," "sick," and "base." Higher types are also described by Nietzsche as nonreactive, creative, self-disciplined, and resilient; and they evince a Dionysian attitude toward life. Since a detailed exposition of these very general characteristics would take me far afield of my central topics in this paper, I propose to pursue a simpler two-step course.

A. First, Nietzsche provides in his writings two unequivocal and concrete examples of "higher" human beings: Goethe and Nietzsche himself.[36] Nietzsche, of course, often expresses admiration for other people—Napoleon, sometimes Caesar, the "free spirits" discussed throughout *The Gay Science*—but Goethe and Nietzsche himself stand out for the esteem they enjoy in Nietzsche's work. Taking these two, and in particular Nietzsche himself, as paradigm cases of human excellence will make it possible to say something reasonably concrete about the alleged harmful effects of MPS shortly. It will also help emphasize that, whatever Nietzsche's illiberal sentiments, he ultimately admired creative individuals the most: in art, literature, music, and philosophy, "the men of great creativity, the really great men according to my

35. See D, 163; BGE, 62, 212; GM, III, sec. 14; A, 5, 24; EH, IV, sec. 4; WP, 274, 345, 400, 870, 879, 957. For example, in a work of 1880 he writes, "Our weak, unmanly, social concepts of good and evil and their tremendous ascendancy over body and soul have finally weakened all bodies and souls and snapped the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men, the pillars of a *strong* civilization" (D, 163). While in a posthumously published note of 1885 he remarks that "men of great creativity, the really great men according to my understanding, will be sought in vain today" because "nothing stands more malignantly in the way of their rise and evolution . . . than what in Europe today is called simply 'morality'" (WP, 957). Similarly, in a late note of 1888, he observes (in a passage plainly echoing the preface of GM), "Whoever reflects upon the way in which the type man can be raised to his greatest splendor and power will grasp first of all that he must place himself outside morality; for morality has been essentially directed to the opposite end: to obstruct, or destroy that splendid evolution wherever it has been going on" (WP, 897).

36. I should not be construed here as endorsing the idiosyncratic view defended in the last chapter of Nehamas. According to Nehamas, Nietzsche does not *describe* his ideal person—his "higher man"—but rather "exemplifies" such a person in the form of the "character" that is constituted by and exemplified in his literary corpus. Nietzsche, however, *describes* at great length and in many places (see D, 201; GS, 55; BGE, 287; WP, 943) the types of persons he admires, and he also describes himself as such a person (see EH, I, sec. 2). For further criticism of Nehamas on this and other points, see my "Nietzsche and Aestheticism."

understanding" (WP, 957). His critique of morality is, in an important sense, driven by the realization that the *moral* life is essentially inhospitable to the truly creative life, a point to which I shall return below.[37]

B. Second, I want to offer some greater—albeit brief—detail concerning at least one of the above-mentioned characteristics of higher men, namely, their "Dionysian" attitude toward life. An agent, for Nietzsche, has a *Dionysian attitude* toward life insofar as that agent affirms his life unconditionally, in particular, insofar as he affirms it notwithstanding the "suffering" or other hardships it has involved.[38] An agent *affirms* his life in Nietzsche's sense only insofar as that agent would gladly will its eternal return, that is, will the repetition of his life through eternity.[39] Thus, higher human beings are marked by a distinctive Dionysian attitude toward their lives: they would gladly will the repetition of their lives eternally. Note, too, that Nietzsche claims that this attitude characterized both himself and Goethe (on Nietzsche, see EH, III, CW-4; on Goethe, TI, IX, sec. 49). We shall see shortly how this trademark attitude of higher types—their Dionysian attitude toward life—is implicated in Nietzsche's critique of the normative agenda of MPS.[40]

37. This type of simplifying move, however, does not obviously help us get a fix on who "lower men" are supposed to be. Yet not saying more about "lower men" is not necessarily problematic for my project here of characterizing Nietzsche's conception of MPS. For the heart of Nietzsche's complaint is simply that MPS has a *deleterious effect on higher types* (i.e., those who manifest human excellence). It is true that Nietzsche also seems to think that MPS is in the interests of other persons—"lower men"—but this by itself is *not* objectionable; recall that Nietzsche says, "The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd—but not reach out beyond it" (WP, 287). It is this "reaching out beyond," then, that is at issue because it is this that *harms* "higher men." If there were a social order in which MPS existed—and in which it served the interests of "lower" types—without having any effects on potentially "higher men," then one would imagine that Nietzsche should have no objections. In that case, one could leave the issue of who "lower men" are pleasantly vague without any cost to the analytical task of getting clear about Nietzsche's critique of morality.

38. So an agent who says, colloquially speaking, "I would gladly lead my life again, except for the time in my thirties when I was ill and depressed," would not affirm life in the requisite sense.

39. For example, EH, III, Z-1: "The idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formulation of affirmation that is at all attainable" (cf. BGE, 56).

40. Some writers (e.g., Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* [London: Routledge, 1983]) have argued that Nietzsche objects to MPS centrally because it is harmful to "life." The main difficulty with this approach, even as it is typically developed, is its vagueness: as Mark Platts remarks, "*Morality versus life* is not the best defined of battle lines" (*Moral Realities* [London: Routledge, 1991], p. 220). I argue elsewhere that when Nietzsche speaks of morality being harmful to "life," he really means harmful to "higher men"; see my "Morality in the Pejorative Sense," pp. 132–34. Other writers (including Schacht again) have suggested that Nietzsche criticizes morality by reference to his preferred standard of "value" as "will to power." I ignore this possibility here, because it seems to make the notion of "will to power" more central to Nietzsche's mature thought than recent

What norms, then, comprise an MPS? Nietzsche identifies a variety of normative positions[41]—what we may characterize simply as "pro" and "con" attitudes—as constituting the distinctive normative component of MPS. So, for example, a morality will be an MPS if it embraces any one or more of the following sorts of normative views:

1. Pro: Happiness
   Con: Suffering
   (GS, p. 338; Z, III, 1; BGE, pp. 202, 225)
2. Pro: Altruism or selflessness
   Con: Self-love or self-interest[42]
   (GS, pp. 328, 345; Z, III, sec. 10; GM, P, 5; TI, IX, sec. 35; EH, III, D-2 and IV, sec. 7)
3. Pro: Equality
   Con: Inequality
   (GS, 377; Z, IV, sec. 13; BGE, 257; TI, IX, sec. 48; A, 43; WP, 752)
4. Pro: Pity
   Con: Indifference to the suffering
   (GS, 338; Z, III, sec. 9; GM, P, 5; A, 7)

Three observations about how to understand this picture of Nietzsche's critique are in order:

1. The various possible normative components of an MPS should be construed as *ideal-typical:* they single out for emphasis and criticism certain important features of larger and more complex normative views. Nietzsche himself remarks that while there is "a vast realm of subtle feelings of value and difference of value which are alive, grow, beget, and perish," we still need "attempts to present vividly some of the more frequent and recurring forms of such living crystallizations—all to prepare a *typology* of morals" (BGE, 186). In criticizing MPS, we should see Nietzsche as criticizing some of the "frequent and recurring forms" that mark various ideal types of MPS.

2. In characterizing MPS in terms of its "pro" and "con" attitudes, I do not mean to suggest that MPS consists only of such "attitudes": to the contrary, associated with each of these attitudes could be various prescriptive and proscriptive commands, suitable to the plethora of par-

---

scholarship would suggest is warranted. See Mazzino Montinari, "Nietzsches *Nachlass* von 1885 bis 1888 oder Textkritik und Wille zur Macht," in his *Nietzsche Lesen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982); Clark, pp. 212–27. Textual worries aside, I doubt whether a good argument can even be made out that "will to power" provides Nietzsche with his standard of value. I make this case in an unpublished manuscript, "Nietzsche's Metaethics."

41. For a more complete discussion, see again my "Morality in the Pejorative Sense," pp. 134–42.

42. Nietzsche only advocates "severe" self-love, i.e., highly critical concern with the self, as the only self-love conducive to the full flourishing of the strong and healthy individual. See EH, IV, sec. 7, and the further discussion below.

ticular circumstances to which such attitudes might be relevant. Yet Nietzsche is typically concerned with the underlying (ideal-typical) attitude—or "spirit"—of MPS, rather than the particular rules of conduct.

3. Let us say that that which MPS has a "pro" attitude toward is the "Pro-Object," while that which MPS has a "con" attitude toward is the "Con-Object." Keeping in mind that what seems to have *intrinsic* value for Nietzsche is "human excellence"—the sort of excellence qua creative genius exemplified by Goethe and Nietzsche, for example—we can say that Nietzsche's criticisms consist of two parts:

> *a*) With respect to the Pro-Object, Nietzsche argues either (i) that the Pro-Object has no *intrinsic* value (in the cases where MPS claims it does) or (ii) that it does not have any or not nearly as much *extrinsic* value as MPS treats it as having; and
> *b*) With respect to the Con-Object, Nietzsche argues *only* that the Con-Objects are *extrinsically* valuable for the cultivation of human excellence and that this is obscured by the "con" attitude endorsed by MPS.

In other words, what unifies Nietzsche's seemingly disparate critical remarks—about altruism, happiness, pity, equality, Kantian respect for persons, utilitarianism, and so on—is that he thinks a culture in which such norms prevail as morality will be a culture which eliminates the conditions for the realization of human excellence, the latter requiring, on Nietzsche's view, concern with the self, suffering, a certain stoic indifference, a sense of hierarchy and difference, and the like. Indeed, when we turn to the *details* of Nietzsche's criticisms of these various norms we find that, in fact, he focuses precisely on how they are inhospitable to human excellence. I want to illustrate this point here with just one example.

According to Nietzsche, the "spirit" of MPS is that happiness is good and suffering bad.[43] What, one wonders, could be harmful about this sort of seemingly innocuous valuation? An early remark of Nietzsche's suggests an answer:

> Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand?* Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections? (D, 174)

In a later work, Nietzsche says, referring to hedonists and utilitarians, "Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal, that seems to us an

43. One problem with this view is that its endpoint—the abolition of suffering and the reign of happiness—is an impossibility because Nietzsche holds that "happiness and unhappiness are sisters" (GS, 338), that we must have both in order to have either. Although the unity of apparent opposites is a recurring theme in Nietzsche, it is not central to his objection to this aspect of MPS. A useful discussion of this theme can be found in Nehamas, pp. 209–11.

end, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible" (BGE, 225). By the hedonistic doctrine of well-being, Nietzsche takes the utilitarians to have in mind "*English* happiness," namely, "comfort and fashion" (BGE, 228),[44] a construal which, if unfair to *some* utilitarians, may do justice to our ordinary aspirations to happiness. In a similar vein, Nietzsche has Zarathustra dismiss "wretched contentment" as an ideal (Z, pref. 3), while also revealing that it was precisely "the last men"—the "most despicable men"—who "invented happiness" in the first place (pref. 5).

Thus, the first part of Nietzsche's objection is this: happiness is not an intrinsically valuable end; men who aim for it—directly or through cultivating the dispositions that lead to it—would be "ridiculous and contemptible." Note, of course, that Nietzsche allows that he himself and the "free spirits" will be "cheerful"—they are, after all, the proponents of the "gay science" (cf. GS). But the point is that such "happiness" is not *criterial* of being a *higher* person, and thus it is not something that the higher person—in contrast to the adherent of MPS—aims for.

But why is it that aiming for happiness would make a person so unworthy of admiration? Nietzsche's answer appears to be this: because *suffering* is positively necessary for the cultivation of human excellence, which is the only thing, on Nietzsche's view, that warrants admiration. Nietzsche writes, for example, that

> The discipline of suffering [*Die Zucht des Leidens*], of *great* suffering—do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength. . . . [W]hatever has been granted to [the human soul] of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness—was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (BGE, 225; cf. BGE, 270)

Now Nietzsche is not arguing here that—in contrast to the view of MPS—suffering is really *intrinsically* valuable; the value of suffering is only extrinsic: suffering—"great" suffering—is a prerequisite of any great human achievement.[45] Nietzsche's attack, then, conforms to

44. Nietzsche no doubt construes the doctrine thus uncharitably because he thinks that the "British utilitarians . . . walk clumsily and honorably in Bentham's footsteps" and that they have "not a new idea, no trace of a subtler version or twist of an old idea" (BGE, 228). Mill, of course, was at pains to develop a subtler hedonistic doctrine than Bentham's, though it is an open question whether in the process he does not pour all the content out of the notion of "pleasure." In any event, Nietzsche drew no distinction between Bentham and Mill—referring to the latter (in an especially intemperate spirit) as "the flathead John Stuart Mill" (WP, 30).

45. Compare GS, pref. 3: "Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit. . . . I doubt that such pain makes us 'better'; but I know that it makes us more profound."

the model sketched above: (1) he rejects the view that happiness is *intrinsically* valuable; and (2) he thinks that the negative attitude of MPS toward suffering obscures its important extrinsic value.

In regard to (2), it is worth recalling a biographical fact about Nietzsche, namely, that perhaps no philosopher in history knew suffering more intimately than he did.[46] For many years, he endured excruciating headaches and nausea, lasting for days at a time, during which he was bedridden and often alone. Yet notwithstanding his appallingly bad health throughout the 1880s, he produced in less than a decade the bulk of his remarkable philosophical corpus. In fact, he believed that his suffering contributed essentially to his work; here is a typical—admittedly hyperbolic—remark from *Ecce Homo*:[47]

> In the midst of the torments that go with an uninterrupted three-day migraine, accompanied by laborious vomiting of phlegm, I possessed a dialectician's clarity *par excellence* and thought through with very cold blood matters for which under healthier circumstances I am not mountain-climber, not subtle, not *cold* enough. (EH, I, sec. 1)

Thus, on Nietzsche's picture of his own life, it was absolutely essential and invaluable that he suffered as he did, hence his willingness to will his life's eternal return, *including all its suffering*. We might add, too, that if Nietzsche had taken seriously the MPS evaluation of happiness and suffering, then he should not have been able to maintain his Dionysian attitude toward life; to the contrary, rather than will its repetition, he should have judged his life a failure because it involved so much hardship.[48]

Now it may perhaps be quite true, even uncontroversial, that great achievements (certainly great artistic achievements) seem to grow out of intense suffering: there is no shortage in the history of art and literature of such cases. But granting that, we come up against a serious objection to Nietzsche's position, namely, why should anyone think an MPS is an obstacle to this phenomenon? This is what I shall call the "Harm Puzzle," and the puzzle is this: why should one think that the general moral prescription to alleviate suffering must stop the suffering of great artists, hence stopping them from producing great

46. For a general account, see Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

47. Compare this letter of January 1880, quoted ibid., p. 219: "My existence is a fearful burden. I would have thrown it off long ago if I had not been making the most instructive tests and experiments on mental and moral questions in precisely this condition of suffering and almost complete renunciation."

48. Nietzsche, in fact, reverses the MPS valuation, commenting, "Never have I felt happier with myself than in the sickest and most painful periods of my life" (EH, III, HAH-4).

art? One might think, in fact, that an MPS could perfectly well allow an exception for those individuals whose own suffering is essential to the realization of central life projects. How, then, does MPS "harm" potentially "higher types"?

IV. NIETZSCHE AND THE MORALITY CRITICS

This question serves as a natural point at which to revisit the apparent affinity between Nietzsche and the Morality Critics. As we saw earlier, these Critics argued that morality, because of its commitment to an impersonal point of view and a corresponding impartial standard of value, will prove incompatible with important personal projects and attachments that we all have: such projects, after all, are just one among many from the moral point of view, and thus may have to be sacrificed when morality demands it. These philosophers then argue that since it would be unacceptable actually to forgo these projects and attachments, we must reject the idea that moral considerations are necessarily the practically determinative considerations, overriding all others: sometimes the Good Life must override the Moral Life.

There are, of course, certain obvious differences between the views of these "Morality Critics" and the Nietzsche we have just explored. As Richard Miller has recently observed,[49]

> Nietzsche often seems to recommend that the constraints of morality be ignored, but it would be a misreading of his intentions to infer that morality ought to be ignored by someone of middling abilities, or a primary interest in family life, or by someone whose characteristic striving is a successful leveraged buy-out. In contrast, the troubling recommendations at the center of current disputes are very broadly addressed. In particular, Bernard Williams' influential warnings about morality are addressed, primarily, to people with normal attachments and their own projects, projects which may be of ordinary sorts.

This difference in audience is clearly reflected in the differences in worries about what it is morality conflicts with. Thus, the Morality Critics speak of the Moral Life conflicting with, for example, "love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community" (Stocker, p. 461); with "the kind of personal life that many of us take to be desirable" (Nagel, *View from Nowhere,* p. 189); with "a healthy, well-rounded, richly developed" life which might include "reading Victorian novels, playing the oboe, or improving [one's] backhand" (Wolf, p. 421); with "the importance of individual character and personal relations" (Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," p. 201). These worries

49. Richard Miller, *Moral Differences* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 309.

plainly strike a somewhat different note from Nietzsche, who speaks of morality posing a threat, for example, to "the *highest power and splendor* actually possible to the type man" (GM, pref., sec. 6); to "the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men, the pillars of a *strong* civilization" (D, 163); to "all that is rare, strange, privileged . . . the higher soul, the higher duty, the higher responsibility, and the abundance of creative power and masterfulness" (BGE, 212); to the "men of great creativity, the really great men according to my understanding" (WP, 957). Here the worry is not merely that the Moral Life will interfere with various mundane personal goods important to us all, but rather that it is incompatible with the highest forms of human excellence: it seems that the Moral Life, for Nietzsche, is not a threat to the Good Life but to the Extraordinary Life.

Yet even this difference, we might insist, is really one of degree: for, even if Nietzsche is concerned *not* with the incompatibility of the Moral Life and the Good Life but rather with the tension between the Moral Life and the *Extraordinary* Life, he still seems to join with these Morality Critics in urging that when morality would conflict with certain important nonmoral goods and considerations, morality must sometimes (perhaps for Nietzsche, every time) lose.[50]

It is *this* apparent similarity that bears most directly on the Harm Puzzle now before us. For a number of recent writers have argued—contra the Morality Critics—that morality is *not* incompatible with our various personal projects and attachments, because such projects and attachments can be accommodated within the moral point of view.[51] The utilitarian, for example, is interested in producing the

50. Indeed, even among Morality Critics we sometimes hear echoes of the specifically Nietzschean worry, e.g., in the famous Gauguin case, where it is supposed that the Moral Life would undermine "great creativity," or in Wolf's worry that the moral saint cannot achieve "any of a great variety of forms of personal excellence" (p. 426). Moreover, we have already noted that there is clearly an element of extremism running through Nietzsche's critical position; e.g., we can be sure that Nietzsche would not agree with Wolf that a critique of morality does not show "that moral value should not be an important, even the most important, kind of value we attend to in evaluating and improving ourselves and our world" (p. 438). Yet we can live (probably happily) with these differences of degree and still think that Nietzsche joins cause with the Morality Critics, quite broadly, in accepting the truth of IT and rejecting OT.

51. See the literature cited above in n. 25. As we saw earlier, there are really two strands in the responses to the Morality Critics: what we might call "Bullet Biters" and "Accommodationists." Bullet Biters like Conly, Herman, and Baron simply "bite the bullet" on the challenge of the Morality Critics: yes, these writers concede, morality is incompatible with a certain sort of commitment to personal projects—but so much the better, the Bullet Biters claim. For the sort of ability of personal projects to override morality that the Critics envision is not appealing, admirable, or central to a person's character or integrity. By contrast, Accommodationists like Railton, Nagel, and Darwall accept the force of the Critics' challenge but claim that morality can, contrary to IT,

greatest amount of happiness possible; if sundering people from their most basic projects and attachments would subvert aggregate happiness, then there can be no utilitarian reason for thinking that the right course of action.[52] Our personal projects and attachments are sanctioned from an objective moral point of view, one that takes into account the net effect of having us abandon them every time a more immediate moral demand arises.

Why not think, then, that a similar response will suffice for Nietzsche's challenge? This, of course, is just a variation on the earlier Harm Puzzle. For if suffering will actually facilitate some individual's flourishing, then surely morality can recommend that that person suffer. After all, a prescription to alleviate suffering does not arise in a vacuum: presumably it reflects a concern with promoting well-being, under some construal. But if some individuals—nascent Goethes, Nietzsches, and other artistic geniuses—would be *better off* with a good dose of suffering, then why would morality recommend otherwise? Nietzsche, like the Morality Critics, falls victim, it seems, to the "objective" point of view embraced by the defenders of morality.

Or does he? In fact, if this response does work against the Morality Critics, it decidedly does not work against Nietzsche's critique: for Nietzsche's point, we might say, is not about *theory* but about *culture*. That is, Nietzsche's idea seems to be that when MPS values predominate in a culture, they invariably affect the attitudes of all members of that culture. If MPS values emphasize the badness of suffering and the goodness of happiness, that will surely have an effect on how individuals with the potential for great achievements will understand, evaluate, and conduct their own lives. If suffering is a precondition for these individuals to in fact do anything great, and if they have internalized the norm that suffering must be alleviated and that happiness is the ultimate goal, then we run the risk that rather than—to put it crudely—suffer and create, they will instead waste their energies pursuing pleasure, lamenting their suffering, and seeking to alleviate it. MPS values may not explicitly prohibit artists or other potentially "excellent" persons from ever suffering, but the risk is that a cul-

---

accommodate the sorts of personal projects that the Morality Critics care about. It is the response of the Accommodationists that is analogous to the challenge posed by the Harm Puzzle. (Needless to say, the line between the two types of theory defenders is not hard and fast. See Railton's account of why "alienation is not always a bad thing," pp. 106–8, and compare with the position of the Bullet Biters.)

52. For doubts that this is, in fact, an adequate response, see Wolf, p. 428. For related discussion of the important *political* dimension of these issues, see Railton, pp. 122–23; and Nagel, *View from Nowhere,* pp. 206–7. For a very different perspective on this debate, however, see the scathing critique of the Morality Critics (including Wolf) in Catherine Wilson, "On Some Alleged Limitations to Moral Endeavor," *Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993): 275–89.

ture—like ours—which has internalized the norms *against* suffering and *for* pleasure will be a culture in which potential artists—and other doers of great things—will, *in fact,* squander themselves in self-pity and the seeking of pleasure.

In sum, for Nietzsche, the normative component of an MPS is harmful not because its specific prescriptions and proscriptions explicitly require potentially excellent persons to forgo that which allows them to flourish—that is, Nietzsche's claim is *not* that a conscientious application of the "theory" of MPS would be incompatible with the flourishing of higher men. Rather, Nietzsche's claim is that an MPS *in practice* simply does not make such fine distinctions: under a regime of MPS values—and importantly because of MPS's embrace of the idea that one morality is appropriate for all—potentially higher men will come to adopt such values as applicable to themselves as well. Thus, the normative component of an MPS is harmful because, in reality, it will have the effect of leading potentially excellent persons to value what is in fact not conducive to their flourishing and devalue what is in fact essential to it.

By contrast, recent Anglo-American Morality Critics take as their target what Wolf calls "a perfect master of a moral theory" (p. 435), whether that theory be consequentialist or deontological. Thus, their critique is directed against the ability of moral *theory* to accommodate the Good Life, while Nietzsche's is directed against the effects of a moral *culture*—one in which MPS norms prevail—on the Extraordinary Life. To Nietzsche's claim that a moral culture will, in practice, present obstacles to the flourishing of creative geniuses, it is simply irrelevant that a suitably "objective" moral theory would not.[53] The Morality Critics, after all, are critics of moral *theory,* and theoretical complaints invariably beget theoretical modifications to accommodate them.[54] But cultural criticism, of the sort Nietzsche mounts, requires a very different sort of response. I will consider in the final section of this paper what some of those might be.

53. Of course, the theorist might object that, even if Nietzsche were right, all this would show is that our cultural practices need correction by a suitable moral theory, one that will permit nascent Nietzsches to suffer and the like. I shall postpone this worry for now and consider it, and several other objections to Nietzsche's position, in the final section of this paper.

54. Compare Lawrence Becker's observation that defenders of morality's commitment to impartiality try to show that the "purported inadequacies [of impartiality] . . . are not really attributable to a *proper theoretical commitment* to impartiality" ("Impartiality and Ethical Theory," *Ethics* 101 [1991]: 698–700, p. 700, emphasis added). See also Stocker: "[The phenomenon of] admirable immorality . . . show[s] how immorality and defect can and must be allowed for in ethical theory" (Michael Stocker, *Plural and Conflicting Values* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1990], p. 50).

Understand, however, that the claim here is *not* that Nietzsche could not be forced into the existing paradigms of critiques of moral *theory*—for example, as Nagel's philosopher who thinks that living well always overrides doing right.[55] My claim has been only that this was not really the heart of *Nietzsche's* critique. Nietzsche was not interested in whether our moral theories could accommodate the Good Life or the Extraordinary Life; Nietzsche was worried whether our culture was making it impossible for anyone to live an Extraordinary Life anymore. It is one of the few themes that animated all Nietzsche's writings from start to finish. In an early essay of the mid-1870s, "Schopenhauer as Educator" (U, III), Nietzsche speaks of "the goal of culture" as "the production of genius" (sec. 6), though there he worries not primarily about the deleterious effect of morality on culture but about "the crudest and most evil forces, the egoism of the moneymakers and the military despots" (p. 4), as well as "the greed of the state" (p. 6). His major work of the early 1880s, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* begins with Zarathustra's image of a world in which all human excellence and creativity is gone, in which all that will remain is the "last man":

> Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.
>
> "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the last man, and he blinks.
>
> The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. . . .
>
> "We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth. . . .
>
> No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.
>
> "Formerly, all the world was mad," say the most refined, and they blink.
>
> One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened: so there is no end of derision. One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled—else it might spoil the digestion. . . .
>
> "We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. (Z, prologue, sec. 5)

55. Indeed, one might pick out various points where the Morality Critics seem to echo Nietzsche. Compare Wolf: "A moral saint will have to be very, very nice. It is important that he not be offensive. The worry is that, as a result, he will have to be dull-witted or humorless or bland" (p. 422); cf. BGE, 260: "the good human being [according to slave morality] has to be *undangerous* . . . : he is good-natured, easy to deceive, a little stupid perhaps, *un bonhomme*. Wherever slave morality becomes preponderant, language tends to bring the words 'good' and 'stupid' closer together."

In the last man, we encounter all the distinctive norms of MPS: the last man embraces happiness, comfort, peacefulness, neighbor love, equality. As a result, the last man can only ask, "What is creation?" thus signaling the distance between him and any type of human excellence, for, as Zarathustra says later, "the great—that is, the creating" (Z, I, sec. 12).

Finally, in his last productive year, 1888, Nietzsche speaks of Christian morality as having "waged war unto death . . . against the *presupposition* of every elevation, of every growth of culture" (A, 43), and he claims that acting in accord with what "has been called morality" "would deprive existence of its *great* character" (EH, IV, sec. 4). The distinctively Nietzschean worry, then, is that our moral *culture*—not our best moral *theory*—is ushering in the reign of the last man, of complete mediocrity and banality.

Even granting that Nietzsche's attack is ultimately a *culture critique,* rather than a theoretical critique, one might still insist that it has an important theoretical component. After all, Nietzsche does call for "*new philosophers* . . . spirits strong and original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert 'eternal values'" (BGE, 203). Could we not find here the real commonality of interests between Nietzsche and the Morality Critics? For aren't both "philosophers" who challenge the overridingness of moral considerations, who reconsider the *value* of letting moral considerations dominate all others?

One difference, which we have encountered several times before, is one of degree: as Nagel's appropriation of Nietzsche aptly suggests, Nietzsche's position within the debate framed by the Morality Critics is far more radical, seeming, as it does, to assign complete priority to the Good (or Extraordinary) Life over the Moral Life. Nietzsche, on this picture, really is "inverting" prior values, while the Morality Critics are, at best, calling for a slight turn away from the hegemony of the Moral Life.

Yet again, the difference cuts more deeply than this, for the *grounds* on which moral values are to be revalued are different. For Nietzsche, they are essentially empirical, growing out of his claim that in a fully moral culture no one will be able to lead an Extraordinary Life.[56] For the Morality Critics, by contrast, the claim is theoretical,

56. The reader may wonder in what sense Nietzsche's claims are empirical, since they are hardly the upshot of systematic investigation into, say, the psychology and etiology of genius. They are empirical, however, in the sense that Nietzsche seems to have reached these conclusions from certain sorts of observation: first, and most important, of himself and his own development (note that the theme only appears in his work in the very late 1870s, when he is about thirty-five and has already been ill for several years); second, of various historical figures and cultures with which he was

namely, that even an optimal moral theory would still require its perfect adherent to forgo aspects of the Good Life. Thus, the "revaluation" envisioned by the Morality Critics—even ignoring its more modest aims—starts (and ends) within *theory,* while Nietzsche's starts from a cultural diagnosis (namely, the cause of our cultural mediocrity—of the absence of genius—is our morality) and ends with a cultural prognosis (namely, our moral culture will gradually yield a society of "last men").

V. NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

If the Morality Critics are right, then we have failed in our attempts to produce an ethical theory that could tell us how to live both well *and* rightly. It is decidedly not an upshot of their critique, however, that, as a matter of fact, we cannot or do not live well: if Utilitarianism, in theory, alienates us from our projects, in reality it goes without saying that it has no such effect. In the culture at large, hardly anyone knows what Utilitarianism is, let alone observes its strictures to the extremes that would lead one to worry that it "demands too much."[57] (The same might, of course, be said about deontology, as noted earlier in the discussion of Williams.) The Morality Critics have shown that the enterprise of moral theory is in a bind, unable to resolve the competing demands of the Good Life and the Moral Life; they surely haven't shown that people don't lead Good Lives.

With Nietzsche things stand differently. If the Nietzschean critique is right, then we are supposed to be confronted with something very real: our untutored morality, the morality of ordinary men and women, the morality that infuses our culture is, in fact, an obstacle to human excellence; the price of our moral culture is a culture of banality and mediocrity, one in which Zarathustra's "last men" predominate, in which "things will continue to go down, to become thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent" (GM, I, sec. 12).

It would be neither surprising nor unreasonable for Anglo-American philosophers to express doubts about their competence to undertake or assess such a critical project: such a "philosophical" undertaking—if that is what it deserves to be called—brings to mind a very different conception of philosophy, in which reflection is manifestly not a priori and analysis is not merely "conceptual" or, in this post-Quinean world, simply the a posteriori handmaiden of the natural

acquainted through his studies and reading. As I note at the end, though, the case for his critique really requires a more sustained empirical examination.

57. Compare Annette Baier's complaints about the irrelevance of moral theory, of its "construction of private fantasy moral worlds" ("Doing without Moral Theory?" p. 235; cf. p. 234).

and social sciences. In its Nietzschean incarnation, philosophy quickly crosses the line into psychology, cultural anthropology, and social critique—territory now occupied (regrettably) almost exclusively by literary theorists.

This conception of philosophical practice, of course, has always been more common on the European continent. Indeed, it is this conception of philosophical practice that binds Nietzsche most closely to the philosophical tradition on the Continent, since he shares none of the metaphysical ambitions of the German Idealists before him and none of the phenomenological scholasticism of many of those who followed.[58] It also has much to do with why the writings of Nietzsche resonate so widely in the intellectual community, while they are often thought rather suspect in the Anglo-American philosophical world.

Yet surely some doubts about the sweep of the Nietzschean criticism are warranted. I should like to conclude with four observations on this score.

1. A natural reaction the philosophical theorist might have to Nietzsche's critique was mentioned earlier: for surely, the theorist might say, what the Nietzschean critique really shows is that our cultural practices need to be *corrected* by moral theory. For if the best moral theory could, as some of the respondents to the Morality Critics have argued, accommodate the Good Life (perhaps even the Extraordinary Life), then we simply need to bring our moral culture more in line with our best moral theory. The proper response to the Nietzschean critique is not despair about morality but a healthy dose of moral philosophy.

One might wonder, of course, how realistic it is to think that our cultural practices will be reformed by the labor of philosophers. As Thomas Nagel remarked rather frankly a number of years ago, "Moral judgment and moral theory certainly apply to public questions, but they are notably ineffective."[59] If there is little reason to think that moral theory will have any effect outside the academy—certainly there is little evidence to suggest otherwise—then holding out the prospect of moral theory can hardly assuage the worries of a cultural critic.[60]

58. Gilles Deleuze aptly calls phenomenology "our modern scholasticism" in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 195.

59. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, p. xii.

60. One might worry, though, that such a complaint will backfire against Nietzsche, for isn't he a "theorist" of sorts, hoping to affect cultural practice? The answer, I think, is that Nietzsche is an esoteric moralist, hoping to reach only a few select readers, those "predisposed and predestined for" his insights (BGE, 30); thus he aims not to reform culture but to enlighten a select few to the dangers of the dominant moral culture. This is why, contrary to a large amount of recent literature, Nietzsche does not have any *political theory* or any real *politics*. I hope to address these issues, however, elsewhere.

This response is not, however, Nietzsche's. Nietzsche's actual response to this challenge has a rather more sinister air, for it arises from what I will call his "Callicleanism." By this I do not mean to attribute to Nietzsche anything like Calliclean hedonism—a doctrine that many writers have rightly noted was not Nietzsche's[61]—but rather the Calliclean view of morality as a tool of the mediocre, as the means by which the inferior make "slaves of those who are naturally better" (*Gorgias,* 491e–492a), by which they try to "frighten [the strong] by saying that to overreach others is shameful and evil" (*Gorgias,* 483b–d). We hear this same Calliclean theme in Nietzsche's claim that "moral judgments and condemnations constitute the favorite revenge of the spiritually limited against those less limited" (BGE, 219) and in his assertion that the "chief means" by which the "weak and mediocre . . . weaken and pull down the stronger" is "the moral judgment" (WP, 345).[62] This Calliclean conception of morality would explain why morality would not want to except potentially higher men from its scope: it is precisely part of the aim of the proponents of morality to *harm* higher men. Reforming cultural practices with moral theory in order to permit higher types to flourish would run counter to a central purpose of morality on the Calliclean/Nietzschean picture.

This response no doubt strikes the contemporary reader as rather odd, perhaps a bit too conspiratorial to be credible. After all, Nietzsche's claim seems to be that, *as a matter of cultural fact,* the proponents of morality aim to cut down the high—that there is, in other words, a conspiracy of the base and mediocre whose weapon is morality. Even if this image seems far-fetched as well as foreign to the central purposes of morality properly construed, Nietzsche may be right that there is a real phenomenon here, though perhaps not of conspiratorial proportions (cf. GS, 359). Think, for example, of the public conflicts between the defenders of moral decency and artists. Such familiar cases might help support the Nietzschean skepticism about whether the cultural protectors of morality would really be interested in reforming morality to make room for Nietzschean creative geniuses.

I do not, however, want to push this defense of Nietzsche's Callicleanism too far. Perhaps we are better off here with the earlier

61. See Nehamas, pp. 202–3; Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism," *New York Review of Books* 38 (June 13, 1991), p. 19, reprinted in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality.*

62. Nietzsche's polemic against Christianity in *The Antichrist* is framed in the starkest Calliclean terms, with Nietzsche describing "the cross as the mark of recognition for the most subterranean conspiracy that ever existed—against health, beauty, whatever has turned out well, courage, spirit, *graciousness* of the soul, *against life itself*" (A, 62); see also WP, 400: "In the history of morality a will to power finds expression, through which now the slaves and oppressed, now the ill-constituted and those who suffer from themselves, now the mediocre attempt to make those value judgments prevail that are favorable to *them*."

response made on Nietzsche's behalf: even if moral theory *might* accommodate the Extraordinary Life, this does not seem responsive to the worry that our actual moral culture does not.

2. A second reaction one might have, however, is that the Nietzschean critique is simply hyperbolic, for surely if there is a culture of mediocrity and banality in ascendance, it is not primarily the work of morality, but perhaps of economics—for example, the free market, the leveling effects of which have been described by sociologists, historians, and philosophers. Indeed, the right model for culture critique, one might want to say, is not the "idealistic"-sounding Nietzsche described here but rather the materialist Adorno of *Minima Moralia,* who traces cultural mediocrity to its capitalist roots.

Now, while the early Nietzsche of "Schopenhauer as Educator" did, as we saw, worry about the effects of capitalism, militaristic nationalism, and protofascism on the cultural conditions for the production of genius, the later Nietzsche seems all too ready to lay the blame for all cultural decline at the doorstep of what I have been calling MPS.[63] Nietzsche's challenge may be a novel and important one, but no one who reads his repeated denunciations of morality can escape the feeling that he suffered from a certain explanatory tunnel vision, with the result that, in some measure, his case against morality seems overstated.

3. On further reflection, however, one might want to say something much stronger: Nietzsche's point is not just hyperbolic, but perversely backward. For surely it is the *lack* of morality in social policy and public institutions—a lack which permits widespread poverty and despair to persist generation upon generation, that allows daily economic struggle and uncertainty to define the basic character of most people's lives—that is most responsible for a lack of human flourishing. Surely in a more moral society, with a genuine commitment to social justice and human equality, there would be far more Goethes, far more creativity and admirable human achievement. As Philippa Foot has sharply put it, "How could one see the present dangers that the world is in as showing that there is too much pity and too little egoism around?"[64]

Here again, though, we must be careful in how we construe the Nietzschean point. Consider the Nietzsche who asks, "Where has the last feeling of decency and self-respect gone when even our statesmen, an otherwise quite unembarrassed type of man, anti-Christians through and through in their deeds, still call themselves Christians

63. Nietzsche also often blames "Christianity," but we must remember that for Nietzsche Christianity was simply "the most prodigal elaboration of the moral theme to which humanity has ever been subjected" (BT, pref. 5).

64. Foot, "Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values," p. 168.

today and attend communion?" (A, 38). Clearly this Nietzsche is under no illusions about the extent to which public actors do not act morally. Indeed, Nietzsche continues in even more explicit terms: "Every practice of every moment, every instinct, every valuation that is translated into *action* is today anti-Christian: what a *miscarriage of falseness* must modern man be, that he is *not ashamed* to be called a Christian in spite of all this!" (A, 38). What, then, is going on here? If Nietzsche is not, contrary to Foot's suggestion, embracing the absurd view that there is too much pity and altruism in the world, what exactly is his critical point?

Nietzsche's paradigmatic worry seems to be the following: that a nascent creative genius will come to take the norms of MPS so seriously that he will fail to realize his genius. Rather than tolerate (even welcome) suffering, he will seek relief from hardship and devote himself to the pursuit of pleasure; rather than practice what Nietzsche calls "severe self-love" and attend to himself in the ways requisite for productive creative work, he will embrace the ideology of altruism and reject "self-love" as improper; rather than learn how to look down on himself, to desire to overcome his present self and become something better, he will embrace the prevailing rhetoric of equality—captured nicely in the pop psychology slogan "I'm OK, you're OK"—and thus never learn to feel the contempt for self that might lead one to strive for something more. It is not, then, that Nietzsche thinks people *practice* too much altruism—after all, it is Nietzsche who notes that egoistic actions "have hitherto been by far the most frequent actions" (D, 148)—but rather that they *believe* too much in the value of altruism, equality, happiness, and the other norms of MPS. It is the prevalence of the MPS *ideology* that worries Nietzsche, for, even if there is neither much altruism nor equality in the world, there is almost universal endorsement of the *value* of altruism and equality—even, notoriously (and as Nietzsche seemed well aware), by those who are its worst enemies in practice. Nietzsche's claim is that a culture which embraces the ideology of MPS, even if it does not act in accordance with this ideology, presents the real threat to the realization of human excellence, because it teaches potential higher types to disvalue what would be most conducive to their creativity and value what is irrelevant or perhaps even hostile to it.

Nietzsche's point here is, I think, a subtle one, for surely it makes sense that individuals of great creativity and sensitivity are far more likely to take seriously the ideology of MPS than the politicians whose hypocrisy Nietzsche derides in the remark quoted earlier.[65] As

65. To say that they take the demands of MPS "seriously" is *not* to say that they understand them in the way a philosophical theory would; it is only to say that they

Nietzsche observes at one point, "What distinguishes the higher human beings from the lower is that the former see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear more thoughtfully" (GS, 301). But it is precisely this trait of the "higher human beings" that makes them all the more susceptible to the deleterious effects of MPS: a thoughtless brute is hardly likely to worry about the morality of his acts, but neither is he likely to become a creative genius. But the higher types that Nietzsche worries about are both likely candidates for critical self-reflection in light of the norms of MPS and, at the same time, those for whom such norms are most harmful. Indeed, we might say that it is precisely Nietzsche's aim to help these higher human beings "see and hear" something more, namely, that MPS values are really disadvantageous for them.

That Nietzsche's concern is with the prevalence of the MPS ideology, not the prevalence of actions in accord with MPS, and in particular with the effect of this ideology on the *self-conception* of potentially higher types is suggested in many places. In *Dawn,* Nietzsche speaks of wanting to deprive egoistic actions of "their bad conscience" (D, 148). In *Beyond Good and Evil,* he observes that in order to "stand all valuations *on their head,*" Christianity had to

> cast suspicion on the joy in beauty, bend everything haughty . . . conquering, domineering, all the instincts characteristic of the highest and best-turned-out type of "man," into unsureness, dilemma of conscience [*Gewissens-Noth*], self-destruction. (BGE, 62)

In *Twilight of the Idols,* he describes the "man" "improved" by MPS as

> a caricature of man, like a miscarriage: he had become a "sinner," he was stuck in a cage, *imprisoned among all sorts of terrible concepts* [*schreckliche Begriffe*]. And there he lay, sick, miserable, malevolent against himself: full of hatred against the springs of life, full of suspicion against all that was still strong and happy. (TI, VII, sec. 2, emphasis added)

In each case, we see that the thrust of the worry is that higher types will come to evaluate and think of themselves in terms of the *concepts* peculiar to MPS (and Christianity)—that they will become "imprisoned among all sorts of terrible concepts"—with the result that they will be cast into self-doubt and a destructive self-loathing, and thus never realize the excellences of which they are capable.

His general point is perhaps most strikingly put in a very Calliclean passage from *Beyond Good and Evil:*

> The highest and strongest drives, when they break out passionately and drive the individual far above the average and the

are more likely to take these unsystematic and inchoate demands constitutive of morality as weighing seriously upon them.

> flats of the herd conscience, wreck the self-confidence of the community. . . . Hence just these drives are branded and slandered most. High and independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, even a powerful reason are experienced as dangers; everything that elevates an individual above the herd and intimidates the neighbor is henceforth called *evil;* and the fair, modest, conforming mentality, the *mediocrity* of desires attains moral designations and honors. (BGE, 201)

"High and independent spirituality," "the will to stand alone": do these traits not call to mind many an artist, poet, and even a great philosopher or two? Yet it is these traits that MPS "brands" and "slanders," and who would be surprised if someone should abandon their independent ways with the force of morality against them? It is not, then, that there is too much pity and altruism in the world, but rather that there is too much *belief in the value* of pity, altruism, and the other norms of MPS.

4. One might want to respond on Foot's behalf, however, and insist that there is still something perverse about the Nietzschean complaint. Granted Nietzsche does not believe that most people are *actually* too altruistic and society *in practice* is too egalitarian; granted that Nietzsche's real worry is about the fact that we, as a moral culture, pay so much lip service to the value of altruism, egalitarianism, and the rest, with the resultant deleterious effects on the self-conception and development of nascent Goethes. Yet surely it is still the case that if our society *really* were more altruistic and egalitarian, more individuals would have the chance to flourish and do creative work. This is the core of the charge of perversity, and nothing said so far has exonerated Nietzsche from it.

Now, in fact, it seems that it is precisely this moral optimism common, for example, to utilitarians and Marxists—this belief that a more moral society would produce more opportunity for more people to do creative work—that Nietzsche does, indeed, want to question. Nietzsche's illiberal attitudes in this regard are apparent. He says, to take but one example, "We simply do not consider it desirable that a realm of justice and harmony [*Eintracht*] should be established on earth" (GS, 377). It is bad enough for Nietzsche that MPS values have so far succeeded in saying, "stubbornly and inexorably, 'I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality'" (BGE, 202); it could only be worse on his view if more and more of our actions were really brought into accord with these values. For Nietzsche wants to urge—contrary to the moral optimists—that, in a way largely unappreciated and (perhaps) unintended, a thoroughly *moral* culture undermines the conditions under which the most splendid human creativity is possible and generates instead a society of Zarathustra's "last men."[66] If we are

66. See the earlier quotations from Zarathustra's description of the last man.

trained always to think of happiness and comfort and safety and the needs of others, we shall cut ourselves off from the preconditions for creative excellence on the Nietzschean picture: suffering, hardship, danger, self-concern, and the rest.

Consider a final, and I think powerful, statement of this view. Speaking of those "eloquent and profoundly scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas'" who seek to promote "the universal green-pasture happiness of the herd" and who take "suffering itself . . . for something that must be abolished" (BGE, 44), Nietzsche retorts that when we look at

> how the plant "man" has so far grown most vigorously to a height—we think that this has happened every time under the opposite conditions, that to this end the dangerousness of his situation must first grow to the point of enormity, his power of invention and simulation (his "spirit") had to develop under prolonged pressure and constraint into refinement and audacity. . . . We think that . . . everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species "man" as much as its opposite does. Indeed, we do not even say enough when we say only that much. (BGE, 44)

Note that at the end of this passage Nietzsche hints at a role for morality as well—it is just that what morality opposes is equally important. He, of course, qualifies this by suggesting that even to concede their equal importance may "not even say enough": that is, perhaps there will not be much role for morality at all in the conditions under which "the plant 'man'" will grow to its greatest heights.

I want to conclude with one final observation about the nature and significance of Nietzsche's critique of morality, for Nietzsche's critique raises a difficulty that, it seems, moral theories ought to address. The difficulty is this: in practice, morality may have a tendency to undermine other sorts of goods or excellences, even when the theory does not actually require that morality do so. Note that this problem remains even if the respondents to the Morality Critics are right that moral theories, properly construed, can accommodate the Good Life and even the Extraordinary Life. For Nietzsche's challenge, recall, is pitched at the level of culture, not theory: the worry is precisely that even if the theory *would* condone or support the Extraordinary Life, the actual practice does not.[67]

We can say, then, that Nietzsche's critique raises the following general concern for any moral theory: what would the culture that

67. In his Calliclean moods, of course, Nietzsche believes that morality really aims to undermine the Extraordinary Life, but one might reject the Callicleanism and still think there is something to the underlving causal claim.

embraces the moral theory *actually* look like and, in particular, would it be acceptable according to the standards of the theory itself? This would not constitute a direct criticism of the theory, but it surely constitutes a worry that any theory we might want to choose to live by should address. It might also help loosen our attachment to what Nozick aptly calls "normative sociology": "the study of what the causes of problems *ought to be*." Thus, says Nozick, "We *want* one bad thing to be caused by another [bad thing]."[68] But if Nietzsche is right, then we may have to confront the possibility that seemingly good things—like many of the norms of MPS—cause apparently "bad" things, like the gradual disappearance of human excellence.

Needless to say, many of Nietzsche's claims about the effects of morality are highly speculative, and they cry out for careful, empirical consideration. The Morality Critics have the advantage, at least, of conducting their critique on safer, more familiar philosophical territory. Yet it does remain striking that, more than one hundred years after Nietzsche cast down his challenge to morality, the topic still remains largely unexplored.

68. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974), p. 247.